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DR. THOMAS' ECLECTRIC OIL

by Catherine Sullivan

Introduction

Of the hundreds of patent medicines made and sold in North America during the 19th and early 20th centuries, few attained real popularity. In Canada, empty glass medicine bottles embossed with the name of a remedy, and sometimes of its proprietor, abound, particularly on archaeological sites that date from the second half of the 19th century. Dr. Thomas' Eclectric Oil is one of the medicines frequently found, and appears to have been popularly used in Canada. It was sold in Canada by Northrop & Lyman of Toronto and in the United States by Foster-Milburn of Buffalo, N.Y. Both companies became large pharmaceutical houses in the 20th century, but both began as wholesalers and creators of patent medicines.

The Foster-Milburn partnership was organized in 1876 with rights to market Doan's Kidney Pills in Canada and later in the U.S. Northrop & Lyman became partners in a drug store in 1859. Both partnerships consisted of one member who travelled for the company, creating a market for products, soliciting orders and establishing the company's name. As dealers in patent medicines, these companies wholesaled patent medicines for which they were agents (Northrop & Lyman, for example, dealt with products for J.C. Ayer, Trask, Holloway and others), made and wholesaled their own brand name items, and products that had been acquired from small proprietors. For both companies, Dr. Thomas' Eclectric Oil was an example of the latter, that is, a remedy the rights to which were purchased from an individual proprietor.

To achieve widespread popularity, a medicine required vigorous promotion, since competition among medicines was keen. Large companies dealing in patent medicines had a network that included a facility for shipping and receiving freight and orders, a team of commercial travellers, a reputation on which to build, and established advertising methods. As well, large patent medicine dealers would use one medicine to sell another. Northrop & Lyman, for example, while extolling the virtues of Thomas' Eclectric Oil as an external remedy for skin eruptions, would recommend internal use of Northrop & Lyman's Vegetable Compound to cleanse the blood, the impurity of which was supposed to have caused the eruptions.

There does not appear to have been any official connection between the two companies that made and sold Eclectric Oil, other than that both followed the trends that made for a successful patent medicine business. In the 1950s, Foster-Milburn organized Westwood Pharmaceuticals to create prescription preparations; that company is still in business at the present. The company that was Northrop & Lyman no longer exists (Lockie 1968; Ambrosone, pers. com.; Sullivan 1982).

Best Hair-Dye in the World.

This is strong language, yet BOGLE'S ELECTRIC HAIR DYE (recently improved) was *proven* to be so by the judges at the late Mechanic's Fair, held in Boston, (among whon was Dr. Hayes, the eminent chemist and State Assayer,) who awarded it the PRIZE MEDAL AND DIPLOMA, over the choicest Hair Dyes on exhibition from all parts of the Union. Its unparallelled superiority consists in—1st, The ingredients are nourishing to the hair, not destructive, as others are. 2d, Does not stain nor hurt the skin. 3d, Is easily applied, and dyes the hair any color required, from a delicate brown to a deep black, so natural as to appear marvellous.

Figure 1. An advertisement from The Canada Directory for 1857-58 (Lovell 1857: 1357). The healing properties of electricity and animal magnetism were in vogue during the 19th century, and many proprietors incorporated the words electric and magnetic in the names of their products and devices (Photo by R. Chan; RD-2207B).

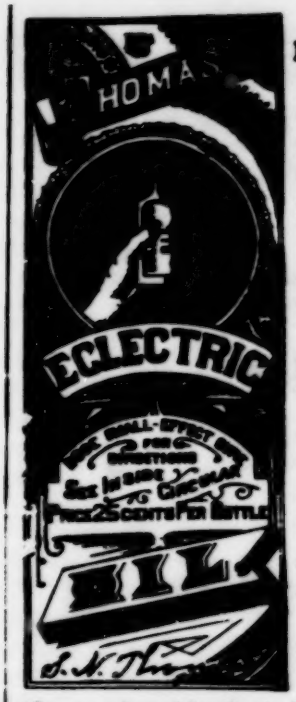
HISTORY

In Canada, Dr. Thomas' Eclectric Oil was introduced by Northrop & Lyman of Newcastle, Canada West in 1871 (Northrop & Lyman 1886). An arrangement made with the proprietor, Dr. S.N. Thomas of Phelps, New York, permitted Northrop & Lyman to manufacture the medicine, put it up in bottles under their own name, and distribute it. This arrangement could have been an outright purchase of the medicine, including the name and formula. However, there may have been some restrictions on distribution under that name, since the Northrop & Lyman company sold the medicine as Canadian Healing Oil in many parts of the world, such as the West Indies, Central and South America, Nigeria, Ghana, Australia, New Zealand and the United States (Northrop-McGillivray wrapper). Northrop & Lyman continued to deal in Thomas' Eclectric Oil throughout their long history, including a move to Toronto in 1874 and a name change to Northrop-McGillivray in the mid-1960s (Sullivan 1982). Thomas' Eclectric Oil is still available in some Canadian drug stores, marketed by Pharmapak Ltd. (Lavoie 1980: 54).

In the United States, Dr. Thomas' Eclectric Oil was manufactured under that name in Buffalo, New York. In either 1880 or 1884, Foster-Milburn Co. of Buffalo purchased the factory and secured the rights to Thomas' Eclectric Oil (Lockie 1968: 113; Ambrosone, pers. com.). According to Foster-Milburn, the name of the medicine was changed to Excelsior Eclectric Oil when it became their property and changed again in 1906 to Thomas' Eclectic (N.B.) Oil. Domestic distribution of the product was discontinued altogether in 1956 (Ambrosone pers. com.). In theory, then, Foster-Milburn never sold the product under the name Dr. Thomas' Eclectric Oil.

Both Foster-Milburn and Northrop & Lyman attribute the original formula for Eclectric Oil to Dr. S.N. Thomas of Phelps, New York. The fabrication of a character, often a doctor of medicine, to author a nostrum was not an unusual practice in the 19th century. Young (1961: 34-5) records both the dubious claim by T.W. Dyott that formulas used in his medicines were given him by his grandfather, a famous Edinburgh physician named Dr. Robertson, and the adoption of the title by Mr. Dyott himself. However, in the case of Dr. Thomas, a Samuel N. Thomas is listed as resident in Phelps, N.Y. in directories from 1867-8 and 1870; his profession is electric physician (Child 1867: 188; Lant 1870: 176). Dr. Thomas may have been an adherent of the school of electro-biology, the name given in ca. 1845 to a form of healing through animal magnetism or hypnotism (O.E.D. 1971: 842).

An origin for the word eclectric has not been found and may have been Dr. Thomas' own creation. It suggests a combination of eclectic — that is, adhering to no one doctrine or theory but selecting the best from several — and electric. The uses of electricity and magnetic forces in medicine date from the 18th century, and many patent medicine makers in the 19th century included the words magnetic or electric in the names of their remedies and devices (Young 1961: 23-7, 172; see Figure 1). Both Foster-Milburn and Northrop & Lyman used as an emblem for the product, a human hand holding a clearly-marked bottle of Eclectric Oil around which electricity plays. It is not improbable that both firms purchased this logo from Dr. Thomas.



CURES RHEUMATISM, Lumbago, Lame Back, Neuralgia, Diphtheria, Croup, Coughs & Colds, Sore Throat, Piles, Frost-bites, Burns, Asthma, Catarrh, Chilblains, Corns, Tooth, Ear and Headache, Bruises, Wounds & Sprains of every description on man or beast. Actually the best External and Internal Remedy known.

CAUTION.—This Cut represents our New Wrapper; take no other, and avoid all similar named articles as they are worthless.

Figure 2. Thomas' Eclectric Oil advertisement from a Northrop & Lyman almanac, 1886.

The cautionary note refers to this style of carton as new in 1886, but it was used with very little variation for a long period. A side panel on the box in Figure 6, thought to date to the 1940s and beyond, reads "Owing to the many worthless imitations and base counterfeits of Dr. Thomas' Eclectric Oil, the Proprietors have adopted this new style of carton." Its design is very similar to this one.

Young (1961: 166-7) has found that repetition in advertising was valuable in the highly competitive patent medicine business. Northrop & Lyman advertisements in almanacs attempted to fix in the consumer's mind the appearance of their package, and, once established, the package, wrapper and bottle, as well as the wording in the advertisement, remained virtually unchanged for many years (Photo by R. Chan, RA-2147B).

ADVERTISING AND USES

Thomas' Eclectric Oil was a leading product for Northrop & Lyman; in their almanacs, three or more pages were usually devoted to it. For Foster-Milburn, Thomas' Eclectric Oil was not a principal item, their leaders being Doan's Pills and Burdock Blood Bitters (Lockie 1968: 112; Foster-Milburn Co. 1925; Wilson & Wilson 1971: 108-9). As has been noted above, Foster-Milburn purchased Thomas' Eclectric Oil in 1880 or 1884, renamed it Excelsior Eclectric Oil and reverted to the name Thomas' Eclectic Oil in 1906. The latter name change was no doubt a result of the American Pure Food and Drug Act in 1906, which, among other things, forbid the proprietor from putting on his label any misleading information about his product (Young 1961: 244). Since electricity had no part in this remedy, the allusion to it was removed (Ambrosone, pers. com.). If the company sold the medicine under another name between acquiring it in 1880 and 1906, one would think that Foster-Milburn bottles embossed with Dr. Thomas' name date to after 1906. However, the bottle depicted in Figure 4, embossed with the Foster-Milburn name and the product spelled Eclectric, was manufactured in a post-bottomed mould, a type that would have been very old-fashioned in 1906 (Toulouse 1969: 582). According to Wilson & Wilson (1971: 90), bottles in three sizes with this embossing are not rare. As well, Meyer Brothers, in a catalogue from 1887 (1970: 192) offered Thomas' Electric (sic) Oil in three sizes, manufacturer unspecified. Thus, the information on Foster-Milburn's Thomas' Eclectric Oil is conflicting.

Northrop & Lyman's advertising for this product seems to have been confined to their almanacs. As with other Northrop & Lyman products, newspaper advertisements have not been located for Thomas' Eclectric Oil, and the company appears to have advertised its goods through commercial travellers to druggists who recommended them to their customers. This company's almanacs advise the reader that Thomas' Eclectric Oil's popularity has not been attained by advertising but by genuine worth, and that the product advertises itself (Northrop & Lyman, ca. 1887: 1).

Universal popularity appears to have been considered a selling point; this message is often repeated in various ways. Eclectric Oil's imitators are said to prove the medicine's worth, since these people recognize a product that is worth imitating (Northrop & Lyman 1806; Timberlake 1877: 300). In this claim, Northrop & Lyman stretch the facts somewhat; some of the Electric and Electron Oils that they imply have been named to imitate their product pre-date Thomas' Eclectric Oil. For example, Putnam (1968) lists several Electric remedies dating from the 1850s, and Urquhart (1976: 48 No. 265; 53 No. 312) illustrates bottles for Hilton's Electric Oil and Morriss's/Electric Fluid/Peterboro, C.W.; the latter certainly pre-dates or is contemporary with the date of introduction of Thomas' Electric Oil. However, these claims serve both to discredit other remedies with similar names and to establish a conspiracy between the proprietor and the public to outwit the imposters. The almanacs include testimonials from druggists who, in their own words, are normally reluctant to recommend proprietary articles, but do so cheerfully in the case of Thomas' Eclectric Oil.

Uses

Whereas many medicines are specifics, that is, with a distinct effect in curing a particular disease, Thomas' Eclectric Oil is an all-purpose, internal and external family remedy for man and beast. However, to recommend a cure, the need for one

must first be established. The following extract from Northrop & Lyman's Almanac and Guide to Health (1904: 320) is an example of persuading the public that danger is ever near:

> It is one of the most useful medicines that can be kept for use in a household, and no home should be without it. It is used on the railway trains and on steamboats by travellers from home who have learned to esteem it too highly to leave home without it. The most careful man or woman often neglects some precaution and finds that nails will pierce the limb, that knives will cut the fingers, that handsaws jump out of their groove, that bees sting, that flies and mosquitoes bite, and that the best, the handiest and surest remedy is Dr. Thomas' Eclectric Oil. Then the children. They are a sturdy stirring lot, tearing clothes and skin, and what the needle and thread are to a rent in a garment, Dr. Thomas' Eclectric Oil is to the wounded skin. And some of the bruises are ugly enough to cause some fear of consequences. Lockjaw, blood-poisoning and such casualties, happen now-a-days from small causes; even turned-in toe nails are a danger. But the use of this superior remedy heals the wound, cleans it out, and removes the remotest cause of danger. So well has its potency as a cure been established that no store is without it, and the demand for it is up in the millions yearly.

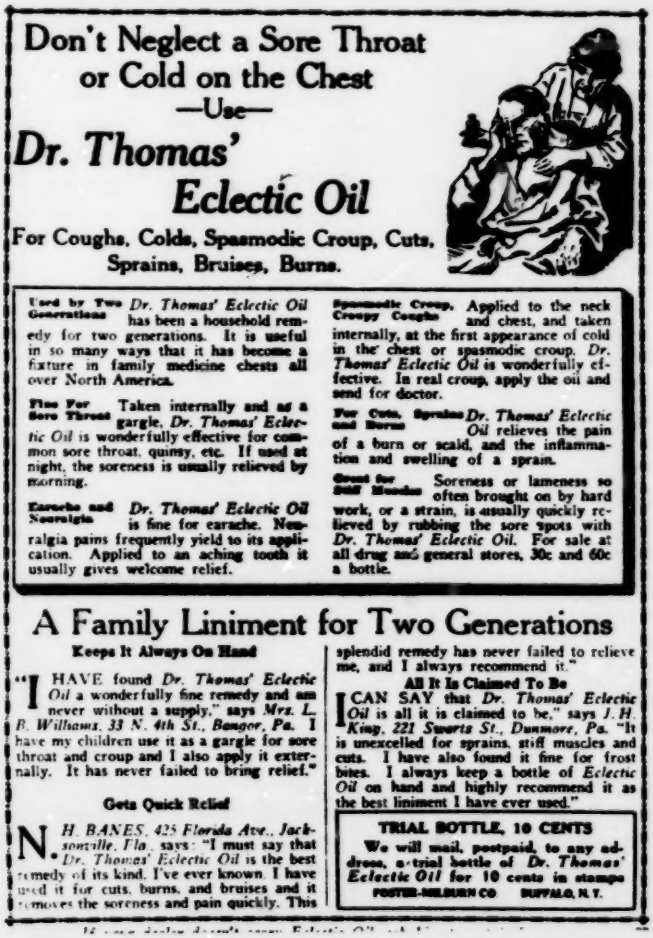
Illness can take the form of disease or of accident. Serious disease can be prevented if caught in its early stages – a neglected cough can become consumption. Accident can strike anywhere, and the only remedy is a state of preparedness – "When puzzled about what to do;" "Would not be without it overnight;" "Would not leave home without it." The message is almost explicit that the home or individual without Thomas' Eclectric Oil is begging for disaster.

Uses for this product guaranteed its success. Its unlimited applicability, both internally and externally, encouraged a constant supply on hand, while its non-alcoholic content, it was claimed, ensured that it would not evaporate on the wound and implied that it had good shelf life. As well, it was advertised as being an inexpensive remedy, since so little was required to effect a cure; testimonials in which three or four bottles were used before the patient was cured seem to contradict this claim, but appear not to have conflicted with the assertion. Its efficacy for the ills that flesh is heir to included those of man, woman and child, and it had its place in either home or barn; instructions for its use for cattle and poultry are included on the wrappers that surrounded the bottle.

The ingredients of Thomas' Eclectric Oil are not revealed in Northrop & Lyman almanacs from 1886, ca. 1887, 1902 and 1904; Northrop & Lyman excused their secrecy by telling the reader that he does not need to be burdened by such details and disclosed that six essential oils of plant origin and no alcohol were part of the formula (Northrop & Lyman 1902: 3, 29). Young (1961: 37) has found that the public became increasingly fearful of medicines that contained alcohol and minerals, such as mercury, and the lack of these ingredients in proprietary medicines was an important selling feature during the late 19th century. Another public concern was reflected in the claim that not only would the condition of the patient improve with the use of Thomas' Eclectric Oil, but that no injurious effects would result from its use (Northrop & Lyman 1902: 5).

It is difficult to know how similar the Thomas' Eclectric Oil sold by Foster-Milburn was to that distributed by Northrop & Lyman. An example of the Foster-Milburn version, dating from ca. 1956, states on the carton and label that the remedy contains Spirits of Turpentine, Camphor, Oil of Tar, Red Thyme and Fish Oil specially processed. In an almanac from 1902, Northrop & Lyman claimed that six essential

plant oils formed the basis of their nostrum. A recent example of Northrop-McGillivray's Dr. Thomas' Eclectric Oil states that the active ingredients are camphor and Oil of Thyme; together these compose less than 1% weight by volume. Both companies appear to have begun to discourage internal use of Thomas' Eclectric Oil sometime after the 1920s. The Foster-Milburn advertisement in Figure 3 seems to stress the remedy's function as a liniment, and a Northrop-McGillivray wrapper purchased with the bottle in Figure 9 in ca. 1969 has dropped all mention of internal use; that in Figure 9b specifies that it is for external use only.



Don't Neglect a Sore Throat or Cold on the Chest

—Use—

Dr. Thomas' Eclectic Oil

For Coughs, Colds, Spasmodic Croup, Cuts, Sprains, Bruises, Burns.

Used by Two Generations *Dr. Thomas' Eclectic Oil* has been a household remedy for two generations. It is useful in so many ways that it has become a fixture in family medicine chests all over North America.

Fine For Sore Throat Taken internally and as a gargle, *Dr. Thomas' Eclectic Oil* is wonderfully effective for common sore throat, quinsy, etc. If used at night, the soreness is usually relieved by morning.

Earache and Neuralgia *Dr. Thomas' Eclectic Oil* is fine for earache. Neuralgia pains frequently yield to its application. Applied to an aching tooth it usually gives welcome relief.

Spasmodic Croup, Croupy Coughs Applied to the neck and chest, and taken internally, at the first appearance of cold in the chest or spasmodic croup, *Dr. Thomas' Eclectic Oil* is wonderfully effective. In real croup, apply the oil and send for doctor.

For Cuts, Sprains and Burns *Dr. Thomas' Eclectic Oil* relieves the pain of a burn or scald, and the inflammation and swelling of a sprain.

Good for Stiff Muscles Soreness or lameness so often brought on by hard work, or a strain, is usually quickly relieved by rubbing the sore spots with *Dr. Thomas' Eclectic Oil*. For sale at all drug and general stores, 30c and 60c a bottle.

A Family Liniment for Two Generations

Keeps It Always On Hand

"I HAVE found *Dr. Thomas' Eclectic Oil* a wonderfully fine remedy and am never without a supply," says *Mrs. L. B. Williams, 33 N. 4th St., Bangor, Pa.* I have my children use it as a gargle for sore throat and croup and I also apply it externally. It has never failed to bring relief."

Gets Quick Relief

N. H. BANES, *425 Florida Ave., Jacksonville, Fla.*, says: "I must say that *Dr. Thomas' Eclectic Oil* is the best remedy of its kind. I've ever known. I have used it for cuts, burns, and bruises and it removes the soreness and pain quickly. This splendid remedy has never failed to relieve me, and I always recommend it."

All It Is Claimed To Be

I CAN SAY that *Dr. Thomas' Eclectic Oil* is all it is claimed to be," says *J. H. King, 221 Swarts St., Dunmore, Pa.* "It is unexcelled for sprains, stiff muscles and cuts. I have also found it fine for frost bites. I always keep a bottle of *Eclectic Oil* on hand and highly recommend it as the best liniment I have ever used."

TRIAL BOTTLE, 10 CENTS

We will mail, postpaid, to any address, a trial bottle of *Dr. Thomas' Eclectic Oil* for 10 cents in stamps

FOSTER-MILBURN CO BUFFALO, N. Y.

Figure 3. Foster-Milburn advertisement for Dr. Thomas' Eclectic Oil (Foster-Milburn 1925: 27).

The emphasis in this piece is on the remedy's efficacy as a liniment, although internal use is still recommended for croup and sore throats. Two sizes are mentioned here as well as a small sample size. The U.S. Pure Food and Drug Act of 1906 forbade the use of misleading information on labels and in advertising of patent medicines; the tone of this example from the mid-1920s is much less hysterical than American nostrum advertising from before 1906 (Photo by R. Chan; RD-2215B).

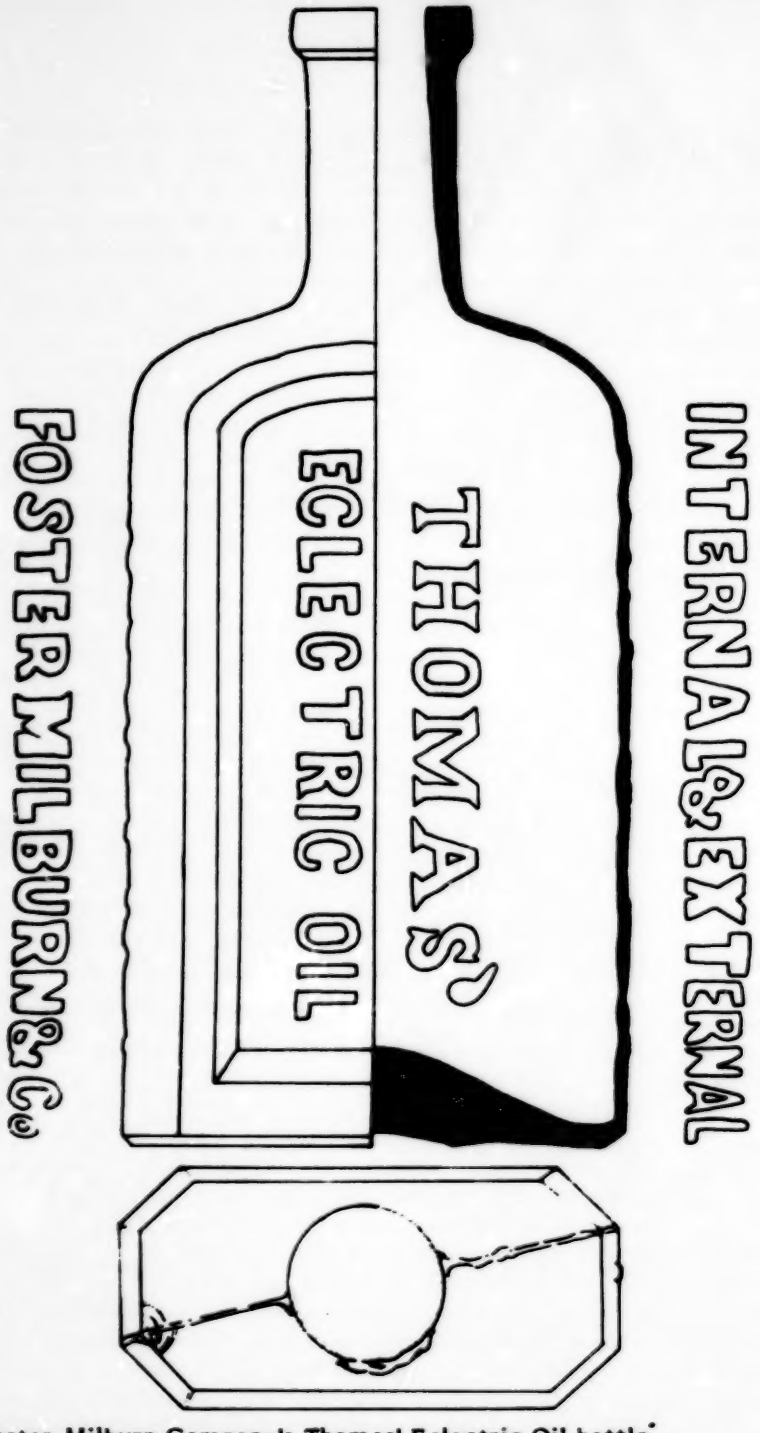


Figure 4. Foster-Milburn Company's Thomas' Eclectric Oil bottle.

This is a rectangular panel bottle with flat chamfered corners, one indented panel on which the contents are named, and a cylindrical neck with patent finish. The bottle illustrated is 175 mm in height and has a capacity of 230 ml (about 7-3/4 American fluid ounces), but bottles of similar appearance are very common in three sizes (Wilson & Wilson 1971: 90). The Foster-Milburn Company has no record of selling the medicine under this name; between acquiring Thomas' Eclectric Oil in ca. 1880 and the Pure Food and Drug Act of 1906, Foster-Milburn called it Excelsior Eclectric Oil. In 1906 they renamed the product Thomas' Eclectic Oil, removing all reference to electric in the name. Foster-Milburn used a standard dispensing bottle for Thomas' Eclectic Oil until sale of the product in the United States was discontinued altogether in 1956 (Ambrosone, pers. com.). (Drawing by S. Laurie-Bourque; 1U3A1-34.)

PACKAGING

Foster-Milburn's bottles for Thomas' Eclectric Oil are a flat rectangular shape with flat chamfered corners and one indented panel with the name of the medicine. The two short sides are embossed with the Foster-Milburn name on one side and INTERNAL & EXTERNAL on the other. The back is not embossed. A patent lip is the usual finish on Foster-Milburn's bottles, and they are apparently fairly common in three sizes (Wilson & Wilson 1971: 90; Fig. 4; Corning Museum of Glass 67.4.93). The bottle most recently used for the remedy by Foster-Milburn is one similar in shape to the unembossed labelled Northrop & Lyman version in Figure 7; it also has a paper label (Ambrosone, pers. com.). The date at which Foster-Milburn adopted this style of bottle is not known, but an end date of 1956, when sale of the product in the United States was discontinued, is fairly certain. It was contained in a box that lists the contents of the remedy. An illustration on the box depicts a human hand holding a bottle of Eclectric Oil from which electricity (?) radiates.

The appearance of the container in which Northrop & Lyman introduced Thomas' Eclectric Oil in 1871 has not been ascertained. Bottles similar in shape and size to those used later, but without the product name embossed on them, date to about the 1860s or 1870s (Fig. 5a). Although these were probably used as a druggists' shape for dispensing a variety of medicines, the style is different from other bottles used by Northrop & Lyman at a later date. Possibly this bottle shape came to be reserved for Thomas' Eclectric Oil after use of some duration. To date, no Eclectric Oil bottles with Northrop & Lyman's Newcastle address have been found. It appears, however, that after the company's move to Toronto in 1874, and before incorporation in 1883, a distinctive package was developed for Thomas' Eclectric Oil.

The earliest marked bottle used by Northrop & Lyman for Thomas' Eclectric Oil is a flat rectangular style with flat chamfered corners and one indented panel with the Northrop & Lyman company name and address embossed on it. At one period, all four sides of Northrop & Lyman's Thomas' Eclectric Oil were embossed, the wording varying slightly over time (see Table I and Figure 6). Marked Eclectric Oil bottles were made by hand beginning in the 1870s, and by machine by 1920. They were enclosed in a carton from at least the 1880s (see Figure 2), and an example in the Nova Scotia Museum suggests that a paper label was not used on this type of bottle. An inventory of bottle moulds held by the Dominion Glass Company's Hamilton branch in 1926 indicates that Thomas' Eclectric Oil bottles were produced in two sizes, two and eight ounces. However, the two-ounce size occurs much more frequently in archaeological collections and was the only size sold by Eaton's in their mail order catalogues between 1894 and 1929 (Eaton 1894: 78; 1929: 330).

The adoption by Northrop & Lyman and by Foster-Milburn of the standard dispensing shape in Figure 7 was probably the result of container standardization during World War II. In the U.S., the elimination of smaller sizes and of some types of specialized containers had increased bottle production to such an extent that glassmakers were reluctant to re-introduce discontinued bottle styles once the war was over (see Miller & Sullivan 1981: 10). Northrop & Lyman, and later Northrop-McGillivray, apparently continued to use this type of bottle until the 1970s (Lavoie 1980: 54), but Northrop-McGillivray also offered Thomas' Eclectric Oil in a four-ounce Prince of Wales Oval and a more modern standard dispensing bottle during the 1970s and 1980s (Figs. 9a and b).

Figure 5a, b, c. Northrop & Lyman's Dr. S.N. Thomas Eclectric Oil bottles.

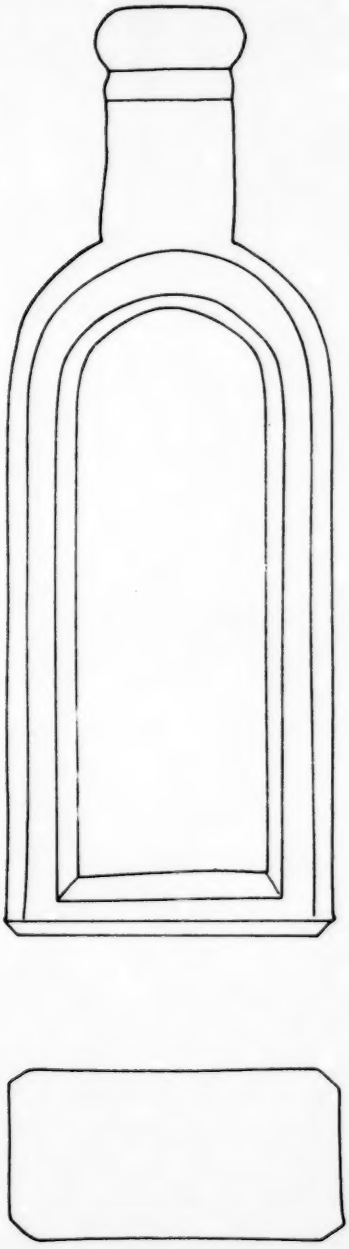
The Northrop & Lyman bottle has a rectangular body with flat chamfered corners, one indented panel on a long side, on which is embossed the Northrop & Lyman name and address, a cylindrical neck and two-part cork finish, consisting of a rounded predominant lip and a v-shaped or rounded vestigal lower element. The hand-blown version has been made in a two-part bottle mould with separate base part, and the neck and sometimes the lower element on the finish were formed in the mould; it has been completed with a finishing tool. All four sides of both the hand and machine-made versions have embossed lettering (Figure 6). The over-all height of the complete Eclectric Oil bottles examined varied between 127 and 139 mm (about 5-1/16 to 5-1/2 inches) with the greatest variation being in the length of the neck; in hand-blown bottles the height of the neck can vary even among those from the same mould. In this shape the bottle contains between 2 and 2-1/2 American fluid ounces (56-70 ml). Base markings vary, but indicate that Northrop & Lyman purchased some of their machine-made bottles from the Consumer Glass Company, established in 1917.

a There is no evidence that this bottle was actually used for Thomas' Eclectric Oil, since embossing on the glass names only the Northrop & Lyman company. However, the basic shape of the container is the same, with minor variations, as those associated with the product at a later date (Drawing by D. Kappler; 1U3A1-39).

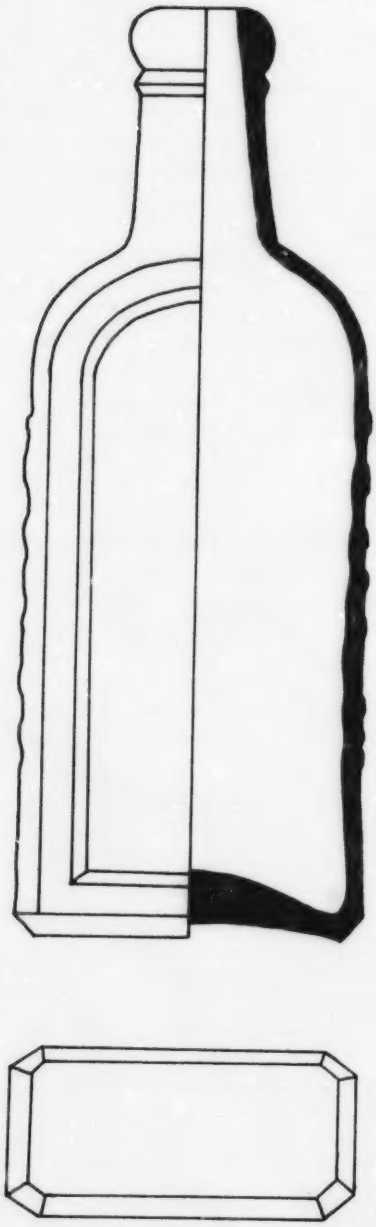
b This example identifies both the company and the product, as well as specifying that the medicine is for internal and external uses. It has been made by hand (Drawing by S. Laurie-Bourque; Smith collection).

c A machine-made Eclectric Oil bottle in colourless glass. The appearance of being more square is illusory, since the widths of the shoulders on this speciman and on a and b are the same, about 51 mm. Base marks on this bottle indicate that it was made by the Consumer Glass Co. after 1920, and the P.P.M. Act registration number for Dr. Thomas' Eclectric Oil is included in the embossing (drawing by D. Kappler; 1U5A1-15).

a



b



c

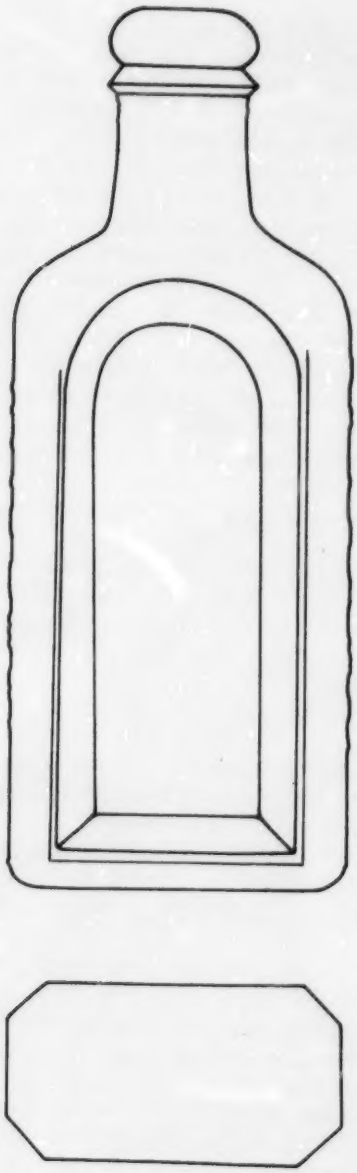


Figure 6. Embossing on Northrop & Lyman Dr. Thoms' Eclectric Oil glass bottles.

The adoption for Thomas' Eclectric Oil of a bottle embossed on all four sides seems to have occurred between 1874 and 1883, that is, after Northrop & Lyman removed from Newcastle and before they incorporated. Eclectric Oil bottles with this embossing are datable, within fairly broad ranges, by the method of manufacture, the wording in the company name (see Table I), and the inclusion or absence of the Proprietary or Patent Medicine (P.P.M.) Act registration number 5520.

The P.P.M. Act of 1908 required that medicine manufacturers, or agent acting as manufacturer, register with the Minister of Inland Revenue and provide a list of products to be sold in Canada. The 1919 amended P.P.M. Act required separate registration for each product (Dominion of Canada 1919: section 3 Part 1). A package, carton and bottle, of Thomas' Eclectric Oil in the Nova Scotia Museum includes the notation on the box's top flat: "This style package adopted July 1920." The carton is like one depicted in 1886 (see Figure 2), except for the addition on one side of the P.P.M. Act number. The Consumer's Glass Company trade mark on the base of the bottle inside dates it to after 1920 (or 1917) (King 1977; Toulouse 1971: 103; Rosewarne 1971: 25). It is finished for cork and embossed as usual on four sides, but the P.P.M. Act registration information is embossed on the side with the product name.

Two Northrop & Lyman products, a cough syrup and a corn cure, dating to the early 20th century both have the P.P.M. Act registration number 40 on their labels (see Sullivan 1982: Figs. 9a and 11a). This is consistent with the original legislation under which the manufacturer could include any number of products on the one certificate (Statutes of Canada 1908: section 3). It is reasonable to assume that all products owned by Northrop & Lyman in 1909 carried the same number when they were first registered. However, the four-digit registration number 5520, by which Thomas' Eclectric Oil came to be known, is more likely to have been allocated in 1919, when new numbers were being created as identifcation of products that needed individual registration. This argues very strongly for a date of 1920 and later for Thomas' Eclectric Oil bottles embossed with the registration number 5520 on the body, whether hand-made or otherwise. The bottle in the Nova Scotia Museum also suggests that Northrop & Lyman did not use a paper label as part of their packaging for Thomas' Eclectric Oil.

a Except for the company name, which changed slightly over time, the wording on the glass surfaces was not altered from the 1870s or early 1880s until, probably, 1920. Bottles marked in this way have been seen in hand-blown and in machine-made versions, both types finished for cork stoppers.

b Embossing that includes the P.P.M. Act registration information probably dates to 1920 and after. Although Northrop & Lyman Company would have registered Thomas' Eclectric Oil in ca. 1908, registration number 5520 was probably not assigned to this product until 1919.

(Drawings by S. Laurie-Bourque; 2H24C3-3, 1U3A1-38).

a

NORTHROP &
LYMAN
TORONTO ONT

INTERNAL

DRS.N.THOMAS

ECLECTRIC OIL

EXTERNAL

b

DR S.N.THOMAS'
N25320 THE PROPRIETARY
OR PATENT MEDICINE ACT
ECLECTRIC OIL

EXTERNAL

NORTHROP &
LYMAN COLIMITED
TORONTO, ONT.

INTERNAL

Figure 7. Northrop & Lyman's Thomas' Eclectric Oil bottle and carton.

Although the shape of the bottle changed very little, embossing, previously on all four surfaces of the body, began to be limited to the indented panel only, identifying the Northrop & Lyman Company. The product name appears on a paper label similar in design to the carton. This style of bottle was probably adopted in response to standardization in the container industry during World War II, and was apparently still being used in the 1970s (Lavoie 1980: 54). (Photo by R. Chan; G.L. Miller Collection, RA-14159B).

Figure 8. Base markings from nine Northrop & Lyman's Dr. Thomas' Eclectric Oil bottles.

Base markings on bottles can include different types of information, such as a manufacturer's logo, a customer's code or a mould number; some include all three. Mould numbers were in use by glassmakers from the late 19th century as a quality control on their moulds, as inventory control, and as a convenience to customers ordering bottles of a particular shape and size. Miller & Jorgensen (1982) have found that, within the Dominion Glass Company's mould numbering system, neither the method of manufacture nor the type of finish affected the mould number. Thus, the same number can be found on hand-blown or machine-made bottles and on those finished for cork or other type of closure, provided that the shape and size of the bottles are the same. Northrop & Lyman are known to have purchase some of their Eclectric Oil bottles from the Dominion Glass Company (Inventory of Moulds, 1926), and the marks here show that some were purchased from Consumer's Glass Company. Other glassmakers that Northrop & Lyman may have dealt with are not known at present.

Since so many archaeologically-recovered specimens of glass containers are fragmentary, base marks of known bottles can be useful in identifying bottle types. The marks illustrated here have been taken from Thomas' Eclectric Oil bottles of the shape shown in Figures 5 and 7. Dating is based on the embossing on the bottles and the method of manufacture, which suggests that earlier Eclectric Oil bottles were not embossed on the bases. The marks have been arranged, as is now thought, chronologically by date of manufacture. Unless otherwise noted, the bottles from which they were taken are embossed on all four body surfaces and are finished for cork.

a A hand-made Eclectric Oil bottle, dating to between 1883 and the very early 20th century. The mark is very discrete and difficult to see.

b Base marking from a hand-blown bottle made between the early 20th century and 1920.

c Mould number from a machine-made bottle from the same period as b.

d This mark dates to after 1920 on two counts – the P.P.M. Act registration number is embossed on the bottle, and the Consumer's Glass Company C in triangle logo was registered in either 1917 or 1920 (King 1977; Toulouse 1971: 103; Rosewarne 1971: 25).

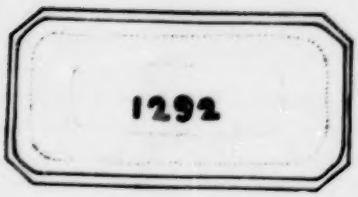
e The bottle from which this was taken is identical to d. It could be that the moulds were held by different branch factories of the Consumer's Glass Company.

f A machine-made Thomas' Eclectric Oil bottle with lug finish. The Northrop & Lyman company address on the body of this bottle is TORONTO, CANADA.

g Embossing on the body of this machine-made bottle includes its size – 2 FL. OZS. – and the address noted as on f. The Consumer's Glass Company mark on the base dates the bottle to between 1917 (or 1920) and 1961 (Toulouse 1971: 103).

h This bottle and the next one, i, are embossed on only one side, the product name being supplied by a paper label. Both bottles have a continuous thread finish, and are, in size, embossing, shape, glass colour and all other respects but the base mark, identical. A manufacturing date of World War II vintage and later is tentatively suggested for both, since the use of a bottle embossed with only the Northrop & Lyman Company name is thought to be indicative of container standardization that was taking place at that period. (Drawings by S. Laurie-Bourque.)

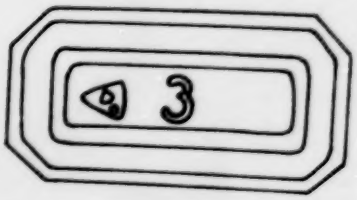
a



b

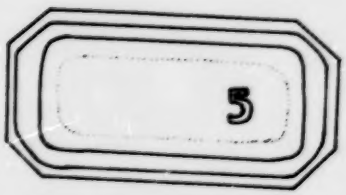
c

d

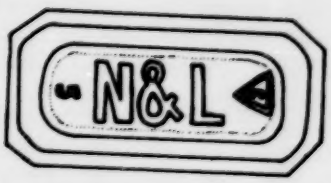


e

f

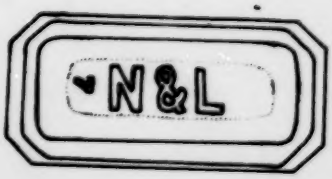


g



h

i



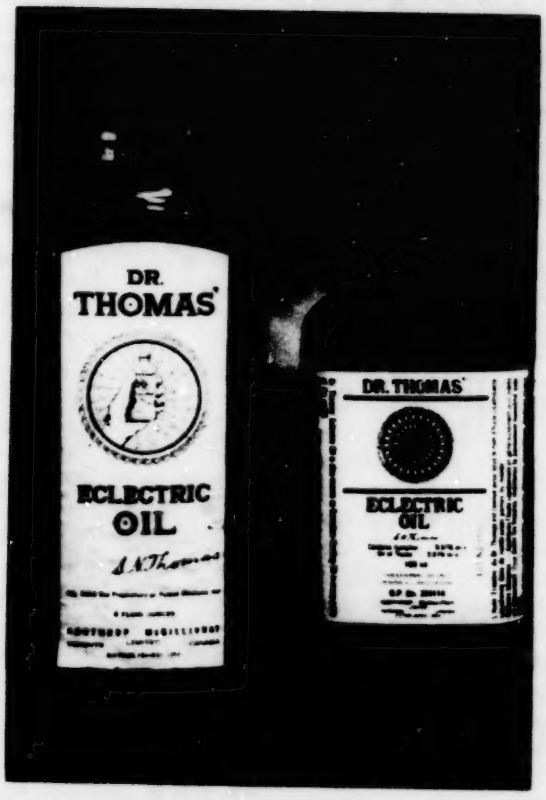
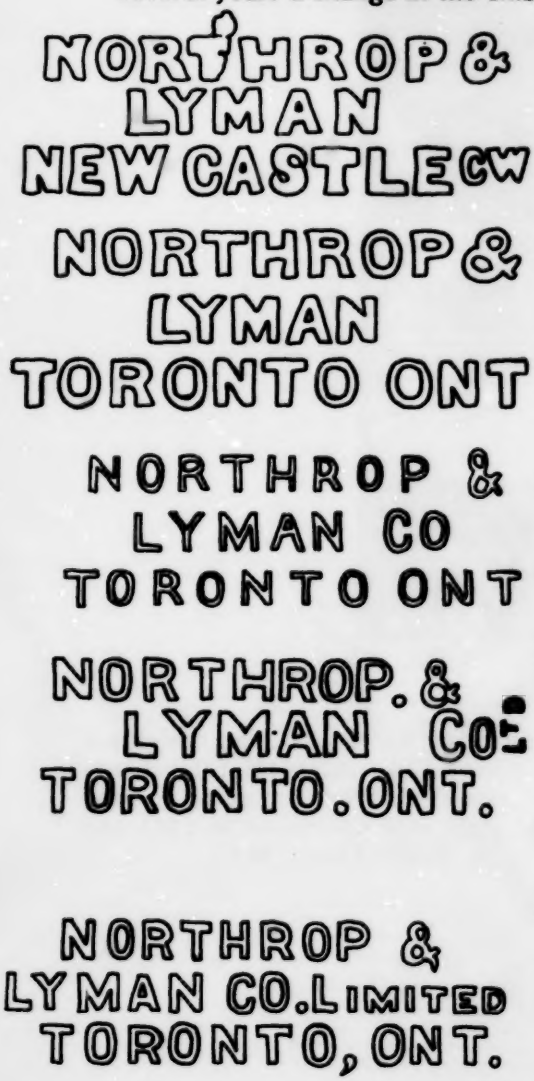


Figure 9, a & b. Modern Eclectric Oil bottles.

The example on the left is a four-ounce Prince of Wales oval, the design for which was registered in 1933 (Richards Glass Company Ltd., ca. 1937: 17). It was made by Dominion Glass Company in November-December, 1969, according to base markings (Miller & Jorgensen 1982). That on the right was purchased in 1981 and contains 100 ml of Thomas' Eclectric Oil. (Photo by R. Chan; RA-14158B.)

Table I. Northrop & Lyman company name and location stylings, taken from four Thomas' Eclectric Oil bottles and one that does not name the contents. The bottles are all of about the same size. By matching Northrop & Lyman directory listings with the embossing and manufacturing techniques, a chronology is suggested for dating Thomas' Eclectric Oil bottles. These dates are proposed for general guidance only, since the way in which the company styled itself on paper could precede by several years a change in the embossing on their bottles.



a The earliest Northrop & Lyman bottles are those that note the company's location in Newcastle Canada West between 1859 and 1874. Dr. Thomas' Eclectric Oil bottles with this address have not been seen thus far, but the shape of the bottle from which this styling was taken is very similar to later Eclectric Oil bottles (see Fig. 5a). 1U3A1-39

b The company's move to Toronto in 1874 necessitated a change in address on their bottles. Two Eclectric Oil bottles embossed this way have finishes the bottom element of which was formed in the bottle mould; both are from military sites in Ontario with some occupation from the second quarter of the 19th century onwards. 2H24C3-3

c Northrop & Lyman added the appellation Company to their directory listings, and sometimes the word Limited or Ltd. in parenthesis, after incorporation in 1883, but their letterhead until at least 1906 read Northrop & Lyman Company. 1H27G11-194

d The word Ltd. on this bottle looks to have been added to a mould similar to c before ordering a new mould, e. Northrop & Lyman put the word Limited in parenthesis or smaller letters in directory listings and elsewhere beginning in 1883, but the word does not appear to have been an integral part of the company name until the second decade of the 20th century. 1U3A1-40

e The addition of the word Limited to the company's title necessitated respacing the words in the company name on Thomas' Eclectric Oil bottles. The container from which this was taken is hand-made, although it is more common to find this embossing on machine-made bottles. If dating suggested in Figure 6 is correct, bottles embossed with the P.P.M. Act registration number date to 1920 and later and will appear only on bottles with the company's name and address noted in this way. 1U5A1-15

SUMMARY

Research on the Thomas' Eclectric Oil sold by Foster-Milburn and on Northrop & Lyman's Canadian Healing Oil, as Eclectric Oil was known elsewhere, is not complete. Dr. S.N. Thomas, electric physician, of Phelps, N.Y., developed the formula, created the name, and devised aspects of the packaging for Thomas' Eclectric Oil, the Canadian rights for which were sold or leased to Northrop & Lyman of Newcastle, Ontario, in 1871. Foster-Milburn of Buffalo, N.Y., purchased Dr. Thomas' remedy and its American factory a decade or more later. Both Northrop & Lyman and Foster-Milburn added the product to their established line of proprietary products and both had a degree of success with it.

Unlike many patent medicines, Thomas' Eclectric Oil did not have a high alcoholic content and does not appear to have been advertised or used as a beverage. It seems to have functioned as a legitimate medicine in that it was expected to relieve the patient's condition. It was applied externally for burns and scalds, rheumatic pain, sore throat, chapped hands, skin lesions, and aching muscles, and taken internally to relieve sore throats and coughs. It could also be inhaled in vapour form for sinus congestion. Application for these ailments in humans and in livestock was recommended, although it also had uses for maladies peculiar to cattle and poultry. Testimonials in which diptheria and other more serious diseases were averted by its use were not uncommon, and pharmacists' testimonials, if they are to be believed, indicate that it was commonly endorsed by members of that profession. The number of empty Eclectric Oil bottles excavated on archaeological sites indicate that it was a popularly-used remedy in Canada.

Known bottle styles for Foster-Milburn's Thomas' Eclectric Oil include three sizes of a panel bottle with patent lip, embossed on three sides, and a standard dispensing oval. Foster-Milburn discontinued sale of the product in the U.S. in 1956. Northrop & Lyman used an embossed rectangular bottle with one indented panel for Thomas' Eclectric Oil from the 1870s until the 1970s, and standard dispensing ovals thereafter.

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